

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, October 2 - October 8, 2010

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2009 annual report) can be found on the FWP website.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Ground based trapping efforts (particularly on public lands) are beginning to wind down as hunting seasons start to avoid incidental capture of bird hunting dogs, other potential user conflicts, and colder nighttime temperatures and the potential for trap injuries. Aerial flights will occur at normal intervals, but also with a sensitivity to not disrupt big game or hunting activities. Other field work to scout, track or investigate public wolf reports continues through the end of the year.

FWP is projecting that the final year end 2010 wolf counts will be similar to 2009, with no significant increase or decrease in the wolf population. To date in 2010, FWP has verified about 96 packs (32 of which are breeding pairs). The best field data come in between now and the end of the year when FWP gets more wolf reports from hunters afield and there is snow cover for tracking and improved visibility from aircraft. Total mortality from January to September of 2010 is higher than the same period in 2009, nearly all of it is related to agency control for livestock conflicts. Additional wolf mortality will also occur between now and December. Cattle losses thus far in 2010 are higher than 2009, but sheep losses are lower than 2009.

Hunters and private landowners are especially encouraged to report observations of wolves or wolf sign to FWP through the online feature at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf> (look for the green Report a Wolf box), by mailing a pre-printed post card available at license agents, or calling the nearest FWP office.

Flights: Laudon flew west of Kalispell on 10/5.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 10/2, WS confirmed a calf as injured by wolves in the Big Hole in the Miner Lakes territory. The calf had to be euthanized. Three wolves were seen running out of the cattle the morning the calf was discovered. The Miner Lakes pack was thought to be involved with depredations this last spring in this area. The wolves seen on 10/2 match what was known about the Miner Lakes pack. However, a radio collar has not been present in this pack since last winter despite multiple trapping efforts to place one. No new wolves/packs have been identified by FWP or WS this year in this area. After previous

confirmed losses, FWP authorized full pack removal, but not all the wolves were killed. WS is authorized to resume efforts to remove all remaining wolves in this area.

On 10/5, WS killed a wolf from the Irvine pack on the Flathead Reservation west of Flathead Lake. Efforts to remove 2 more are ongoing. A calf was confirmed killed in September and previous losses this summer were also confirmed. The adult wolf was killed in a pasture with cattle. A second wolf was killed on 10/8.

On 10/6, WS confirmed that a calf was injured by wolves on private land southeast of Jackson (Big Hole). WS also looked at two other calves that were reported as kills but cause of death was unknown. No collared or known packs are reported in the area as efforts to remove previous packs were completed in this area earlier this year. WS has been authorized to collar and release a wolf to determine current wolf activity levels in this area.

On 10/7, WS confirmed a calf as killed by a wolf or wolves on private land near Pipestone (east of Butte). No known packs are known to occupy this area. The closest pack's radio collar was not heard during the investigation. WS has been authorized to collar and release a wolf to learn more on the level of wolf activity in the area to further help with management decisions.

On 10/7 and 10/8, WS removed 3 wolves from the Murphy Lake pack north of Whitefish after several previous confirmed cattle losses.

#### **Outreach and Education**

Nothing to report at this time.

#### **Research Activities**

Nothing to report at this time.

#### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

Nothing to report at this time.

#### **Other Updates**

On 10/8, FWP updated the FWP Commission on a variety of topics, including efforts by Montana officials to regain state management (including a hunting season), delisting litigation and FWP's appeal, preliminary 2010 wolf counts, and a proposal to remove wolves in the West Fork of the Bitterroot (see below for more information).

On 10/8, FWP received a letter from USFWS that denied FWP's request for a 10(a)(1)(A) permit to have a conservation hunt statewide. The letter also informed FWP that USFWS will not pursue efforts to reclassify the northern half of Montana from endangered to threatened. The letter indicated support for hunting as a management tool, but acknowledged that hunting either through a 10(a)(1)(A) permit or a new set of regulations for a reclassified "threatened" population across northern Montana would be difficult to successfully defend against a certain legal challenge and "no one would be well served by continuing the cycle of litigation surrounding wolf management in the northern Rockies." FWP intends to follow up with USFWS to determine more specifically the criteria and basis for USFWS rejection of the 10(a)(1)(A) permit application.

### Bitterroot Wolf 10(j) Proposal

On 10/7, the FWP Commission approved FWP to seek public comment and obtain scientific peer review on a proposal to remove wolves in the West Fork of the Bitterroot due to unacceptable impacts of wolf predation on the elk herd (which is not meeting population objectives for calf recruitment or total elk numbers). The complete proposal can be found under “Opportunity for Public Comment” found on the Hunting page of the FWP website [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov).

#### Proposal details:

- Reduce wolf numbers in HD 250 (West Fork of Bitterroot) from the minimum of 24 counted in December 2009 to a year-end minimum of 12 wolves represented by 2 – 3 packs from 2010 through 2015; objective = 12 wolves in 2-3 packs in HD 250
- 100 “agents of the state” are drawn from a pool of applicants, not more than 10% nonresidents
- Hunting only from one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset; no baiting or electronic calling/amplification; 12 hour reporting with 48-hour check-in
- Hunting license purchase required to keep pelt and skull
- Fall 2010/Winter 2011 season to start with USFWS approval not before Dec 15, 2010 and running until quota is met, not later than Feb 28, 2011;
- 5-year proposal to USFWS with annual FWP Commission process and rules; proposed management options available for annual definitions by FWP Commission include fair chase hunting or trapping by the public, control actions by agency personnel or designees, or any combination approved by the Commission

#### Public comments sought:

- Deadline for public comment is 5pm Wednesday November 10, 2010
- Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.
- Electronic comments can be submitted by cutting and pasting the following link into your web browser line: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D3ZL3GL>

Pending public comment and peer reviews, FWP may advance a final proposal to the FWP Commission at the next meeting November 18 in Helena. If approved by the FWP Commission, FWP would submit a final 10(j) proposal to the USFWS for federal consideration and approval. FWP would seek expedited review. USFWS can approve the proposal or deny the proposal.

### Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 10/1, FWP filed its appeal with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, seeking to overturn the Missoula District Court ruling that returned the region’s wolf population to the federal endangered species list. The federal government and Idaho also filed appeals.

Background: On 8/6, federal Endangered Species Act protections were reinstated through a ruling from the federal court. The court ruled that the federal Endangered Species Act does not allow the federal government to subdivide a distinct population segment so that a species is listed in part of it and delisted in the other part. The ruling stated that the wolf must either be listed or delisted as one unit within the Northern Rockies region. Further, given that the current Wyoming wolf management plan and regulatory mechanisms are not approved by the federal government and are considered inadequate, federal protections must be reinstated throughout the region.

Wolves across northern Montana are now legally reclassified as federally endangered. Wolves across southern Montana are reclassified as experimental, non-essential. Different federal regulations apply to each area. See <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf> for information about the federal regulations and other updates.

*Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:*

LLRMB will be holding a board meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup> in room 152 of the State Capitol. This meeting will be broadcast over the internet and TVMT. The agenda is available at the board's website <http://www.llrmb.mt.gov>.

LLRMB's meeting will be broadcast over the internet and TVMT. A link to the meeting will be posted the day of the meeting at [www.llrmb.mt.gov](http://www.llrmb.mt.gov).

For agendas and minutes of previous meetings, see the Board's website: [www.llrmb.mt.gov](http://www.llrmb.mt.gov). Look under Board and Meetings on the left navigation bar. Agendas and minutes from previous meetings are available at [Montana Department of Livestock](http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp). The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP online. Use the following shortcut link and be sure to update your bookmarks: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock death loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.